DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 716 EC 305 047

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TITLE Increasing the Responsibility Levels of Fourth Grade Gifted Children by Promoting Positive Character Traits and Caring Behaviors.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 51p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova Southeastern University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Change; *Gifted; Grade 4; Intermediate Grades; Interpersonal Competence; *Intervention; Moral Development; Positive Reinforcement; Program Effectiveness; *Prosocial Behavior; Social Responsibility; Student Characteristics; Student Development; *Student Improvement; *Student Responsibility; Values

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a project to improve the responsibility levels of 16 gifted students in fourth grade attending a daily 2-hour language arts gifted education class. Students had become inconsistent about completing assignments, maintaining an orderly environment, and communicating necessary information to parents. A teacher-developed checklist used before and after the intervention to chart different measures of student responsibility is included. Probable causes of the students' behavior problems are identified, such as the lack of character education at the school. Literature supporting the low level of responsibility generally displayed by students and the need for intervention is reviewed. The specific strategies used to increase the responsibility levels of the gifted students are described, including: teaching the core value of responsibility daily; making use of ceremonies, rituals, and rites to create a place where students experience a sense of security and belonging; seeking student input for rules, guidelines, and procedures; presenting moral dilemmas for students to analyze; teaching a unit on heroes and heroism; creating an anthology emphasizing the virtues of care, quality, and responsibility; having students engage in cooperative learning; and involving students in the community. Data analysis indicated that students became more responsible in producing quality work, maintaining home/school communications, environmental clean-up, effective decision-making, and working cooperatively. (Contains 30 references.) (CR)

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ED 399 716

Increasing the Responsibility Levels of Fourth Grade Gifted Children by Promoting Positive Character Traits and Caring Behaviors

by
Marliese G. Hogan
Cluster 70

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
1996

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APPROVAL PAGE

This Practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Marliese G. Hogan under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

July 10, 1996
Date of Final Approval of Report

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Abstract

Increasing the Responsibility Levels of Fourth Grade Gifted Children by Promoting Positive Character Traits and Caring Behaviors. Hogan, Marliese G., 1996: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Gifted Education/Elementary Education/Responsibility/Caring Behaviors/Language Arts/Cooperative Learning/Moral Development/Community Service

This practicum was designed to improve the responsibility levels of fourth grade students attending a daily two-hour language arts gifted education class. Students had become inconsistent about completing assignments, maintaining an orderly environment, and communicating necessary information to parents. A climate of selfism prevailed in the classroom. Opportunities for prosocial conduct were rebuked.

Embarking on a unit of study that emphasized positive character traits and caring behaviors, students began by cooperatively establishing rules and guidelines that promoted responsibility, efficiency, and order. Literature selections emphasizing the concomitant qualities of courage, cooperation, and care were integral dimensions. Partnership contracts were signed and executed. Writing activities included the maintenance of a responsibility journal and the creation of a student anthology. The students researched and decided on participation in a meaningful community service project. Caring behaviors were specifically acknowledged and endorsed. Classroom spirit was promoted by celebrating competency. Rites, rituals, and special occasions were observed.

An analysis of the data indicated that students became more responsible in producing quality work, maintaining home/school communications, environmental clean-up, effective decision-making, and in working cooperatively. In addition to increasing student responsibility levels, an optimal learning environment was created. The prosocial classroom climate contributed towards an increased positive self-regard. At the conclusion of the project, the students had taken control of record-keeping and charting activities monitoring their own progress and improvement.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The setting of this practicum is an urban low to middle socioeconomic community located in the southeastern United States with a population of 30,466 individuals (Beacon Council, 1994). This multi-ethnic, multi-cultural area consists of 74.6% African Americans, 20.2% Hispanics, and 0.4% Asians/Pacific Islanders. The per capita income for 1994 was listed as $8,723 per year with 35% percent of the households earning less than $15,000, 19% earning between $15,000 and $24,999, 33% earning between $25,000 and $49,999 per year, 11.3% earning between $50,000 and $99,999, and 1.3% earning more than $100,000.

Description of Work Setting

The setting of this practicum is an elementary foreign language magnet school serving Grades 1 through 5. The school is located in a large school district and encompasses two wings of the anterior section of a middle school consisting of Grades 6 though 8. The urban area surrounding this elementary school consists of modest single family homes. Its residents are predominantly people of color.

Students are bussed to the elementary magnet school from 67 different home schools (School Report, 1995-1996 School Year). The foreign language magnet school is one of two in the school district, and it draws students from the entire northern part of the county. Of the 532 students presently enrolled, 40.6% are Hispanic, 31.6% are African American, 23.7% are White, and 4.1% are of other racial extractions.

The school's mission is to prepare students to become global thinkers in a multicultural world. A major emphasis is placed on the acquisition of a second language. It is committed to preparing students to accept the challenges of the new millennium by providing the necessary tools. The goal is for students to become self-sufficient life-long learners whose concerns go beyond themselves enabling them to make contributions to the community, the environment, and the planet.

The school's norm-referenced achievement test median national percentile for Grade 4 attained in 1995 was a score of 61 in reading compared to 31 district-wide, and a score of 79 in mathematics compared to 53 district-wide (School Public Accountability Report, 1995). The school's student mobility rate for 1994-1995 was 5.3%.

Foreign language classes in French and in Spanish are attended by the students for a minimum of 2 hours daily. During this period of time, students leave their homeroom teachers and receive foreign language instruction from certified foreign language teachers. Some of the concepts being taught in the regular classrooms are reinforced by the language teachers in the target languages of French and Spanish. The school day is extended by 1 hour daily for all students (and some of the teachers) as a result of the foreign language instruction.

The school's gifted population is unusually high. Of the 532 students enrolled at the school, 135 have been identified as gifted and talented. In addition to attending foreign language classes for 2 hours daily, these students also attend gifted language arts classes for 2 hours. Consequently, the time spent with their homeroom teachers is limited to approximately 2 hours daily. The homeroom teachers provide instruction in mathematics, social studies, and science.

The faculty at the school consists of a principal, an assistant principal, 10 classroom teachers, 7 foreign language teachers, 4 gifted facilitators, a magnet program lead teacher, a counselor, a media specialist, and 3 special area teachers. Teacher attendance for the 1994-1995 school year was recorded at 95.7% (School Public Accountability Report, 1995).

The school subscribes to shared-decision making principles. Important issues and concerns are brought before a Cadre for discussion and consideration. Decisions involving curriculum, policy, and school climate are usually resolved by the Cadre members. The Cadre is comprised of the principal, representative teachers, a parent, and the School Advisement Committee chairperson. The principal retains the discretionary right to veto decisions.

Writer's Role

This writer is employed as a gifted facilitator and teaches language arts gifted classes to 16 students in Grade 4 from 8:30 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. and 11 students in Grade 5 from 12:00 P.M. to 2:00 P.M. As a teacher with 6 years experience teaching Grade 4, and an additional 3 years teaching Grades 3, 4, and 5 gifted language arts classes, this writer's instructional focus has been in the intermediate level of the elementary school. The students presently attending gifted language arts classes come from diverse backgrounds. Some of their parents are affluent professionals who hire housekeepers to maintain their homes while some have great difficulty paying for their children's lunches or field trips.

One of this writer's primary responsibilities is to design and write challenging and meaningful curriculum for gifted students. The district's requirements for attainment of

grade level competencies must be met, as well as the state's gifted goals and objectives. This writer meets with each student's parent(s) to map out an individualized educational plan. A thematic approach to teaching language arts is utilized, with a strong emphasis on critical and creative thinking. Students are encouraged to become problem-solvers and are given opportunities to make meaningful choices in their learning.

This practicum will specifically target the 16 students presently attending this writer's Grade 4 gifted language arts class. The student population is ethnically diverse: 8 students are Hispanic, 4 students are White, 3 students are African American, and 1 student is Asian. Six students are boys, and 10 students are girls. The group is a congenial one and does not present any significant discipline problems.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that some of the gifted students in the Grade 4 gifted language arts classroom were demonstrating inconsistent and low levels of responsibility in completing homework and classwork assignments, working cooperatively, serving as a liaison between home and school, and in maintaining an orderly environment as indicated by teacher developed checklists, surveys, and systematic observations. Homework and classwork were often unfinished or forgotten. Follow-up communications to and from parents were overlooked or neglected. Group and environmental behaviors were often less than desirable.

Problem Description

Developing gifted students to become motivated and independent was an important goal. Students met with this writer individually for assistance in setting goals. However, the gifted students in Grade 4 did not demonstrate consistency in planning and preparing homework and classwork. Homework was often handed in past the due date, or not at all. It was carelessly produced and directions were not followed. In class, students became easily distracted which resulted in unfinished classwork. Rest room breaks were used as excuses to "escape" from assignments and work. Student papers lacked neatness and quality. In some cases, student work could not be identified because names had been forgotten or omitted. A general indifference and laissez-faire attitude was present.

In group activities and in situations requiring cooperation, some students shirked individual responsibility. The work load was not equally shared and arguments and dissatisfaction ensued. In situations where group presentations were involved, postponements were necessary because one, or more, member(s) did not follow up on work assignment(s). Group grades could not be awarded because some students had fulfilled their assignments, while others had not.

Another area of concern involved the students' work environment. On a daily basis, students left behind personal materials such as pencils, books, and bookbags. In retrieving items that had been forgotten in other classrooms, students requested permission to return for them, resulting in the loss of time and valuable instruction. Some students carelessly handled books and equipment which was costly, as repairs and replacements involved resources and personnel.

The gifted language arts classroom in this school was by nature a less structured environment than the regular classroom. Leading authorities on gifted education encourage educating the gifted in a manner that considers the distinct needs of each gifted student (Clark, 1988). Learners were, therefore, invited to become involved in their own education and were given choices in selecting appropriate assignments. A thematic approach to learning was utilized and students entered into contracts that specified how they planned to meet predetermined goals and objectives. This individualization and freedom may have resulted in student choices that downplayed responsibility. Traditional methods that promoted increased responsibility levels, such as an extrinsic reward system, daily/weekly progress reports, and/or lowered academic grades failed to have an effect for any length of time.

Problem Documentation

The evidence that supported the existence of the problem was gathered over a 4-week period. This writer recorded pertinent information on checklists, gathered data from surveys, and utilized systematic teacher observation methods to accumulate evidence concerning the problem of low responsibility levels.

A teacher checklist maintained by this writer was used to record responsible behavior patterns with regard to homework and classwork (Table 1). Students were awarded 128 opportunities for showing responsible behavior in completing homework and classwork on time and responded positively on only 69 occasions.

Table 1

Teacher Checklist -Student Homework and Classwork Responsibility

Gifted Language Arts - Fourth Grade

Week One		Week Two		Week Three		Week Four	
HW	CW	HW	CW	HW	CW	HW	CW
6	10	9	11	8	8	7	10

Note.

N = 16

HW = Homework, CW= Classwork

A teacher observation checklist was also used to record responsible behavior patterns with regard to progress reports and other parent/teacher communications (Table 2). Obtaining and maintaining school supplies and other purchases were other areas of observation. Given 128 opportunities for responsible behavior in these areas, students responded positively on only 47 occasions.

Table 2

Teacher Checklist -Student Responsibility Home/School Communications

Gifted Language Arts - Fourth Grade

Progress Reports 1,2	Parent/Teacher Communication 1,2	School Supplies Materials 1,2	Purchases 1,2
8	8	3	5
8	7	7	1

Notes.

N = 16

Students were given a period of five days to respond to teacher's requests on two separate occasions.

Parental cooperation was necessary for students to meet responsibility requirements.

Systematic teacher observations were conducted to determine student responsibility in group situations and in taking care of the immediate environment. Given 128 opportunities for responsible behavior, the students responded favorably on only 81 occasions (Table 3).

Table 3

Teacher Observations Log -Cooperative and Environmental Behavior

Fourth Grade Gifted Students

Week One Group Work/ Clean-up	Week Two Group Work/ Clean-up	Week Three Group Work/ Clean-up	Week Four Group Work/ Clean-up
9	10	11	13
10	8	11	8

Notes.

N = 16

Systematic observations were conducted over a period of 4 weeks for 30 minute intervals. Observations were made on group work and subsequent clean-up activities.

In order to determine whether students viewed themselves as responsible persons, a student survey was circulated. The results indicated that 10 of 16 students viewed themselves as responsible persons in the area of completing homework and classwork, 11 of 16 viewed themselves as responsible in the area of serving as a liaison between home and school, and 10 of 16 viewed themselves as being responsible in group work and environmental care. When asked if students viewed themselves as responsible persons in general, 7 of 16 responded that they did, and 9 responded that improvement was needed.

The gifted center at the school site employed 4 teachers of the gifted. These teachers participated in a survey to assess gifted learners in terms of their general responsibility levels. The survey results conveyed that 4 of 4 teachers of the gifted

indicated that gifted students at the school site generally exhibited low and inconsistent levels of responsible behavior.

After careful analysis of the checklists, surveys, and observations, this writer concluded that responsibility levels of the Grade 4 gifted language arts students were in need of improvement.

Causative Analysis

The problem of low responsibility levels among Grade 4 gifted students had a number of possible causes. While the students generally did not present any discipline problems, there existed an atmosphere of indifference and a general lack of caring. Students at the school had not received character education, nor had they been inspired by literature that promoted caring attitudes. They did not seem to realize that being responsible for one's work and conduct was a desirable trait in business and industry. The need to be responsible did not appear to have been authenticated for them.

In addition, their moral development level appeared somewhat low. This was not surprising, because moral illiteracy is at an all time high in today's society (Lickona, 1992). Students were confused as to what constituted right from wrong. Rationalizations had replaced moral argumentations in many instances. The fear seemed to lie not in doing something wrong, but in being caught doing something wrong. A conscious effort to develop moral reasoning skills within the children had only been nominally addressed in the classroom in past years, because the concern of intruding on established value systems had affected the way teachers practiced academic freedom. Students had not been taught to reason, nor had they learned to confront moral issues. Instead, the past several decades

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had emphasized values clarification where all ideas were accepted, and teachers did not reproach students for espousing dubious moral principles.

Role models were also cause for concern. The students were attracted to the glamour of celebrities and "stars." They had a difficult time discerning between heroes and celebrities. Because of the wide appeal of television, movies, and other forms of passive entertainment, the reading of "quality" literature had diminished. In years past, students may have been impressed by positive historical and literary role models. In recent years, the meaning of success had become convoluted as children had begun to associate success with the attainment of wealth or power. Themes of violence have permeated the music industry. Some rock stars have behaved in outlandish ways and may be considered contributory factors to delinquency and immoral behaviors. Lyrics to popular songs involved anger, foul language, self-indulgence, and irresponsible sexual behavior.

Expectations and procedures for responsible behavior were not always adequately communicated and established by the school and teachers. Students were exposed to a number of different teachers on a daily basis; each having his or her own set of rules, goals, and objectives. The lack of uniformity was confusing to students. Instructional time was frequently interrupted and often fragmented. Special interest announcements were made over the intercom, projects and fund-raisers distracted students from their work, rehearsals for shows and performances interrupted learning. Departmentalization contributed to pupil shifting and made it difficult to establish a routine and sense of order. Students tended to welcome intrusions and confusion, however, as the diversion was viewed as an opportunity to deviate from the routine of daily schoolwork.

Literature selections based on "themes of care" had not been promoted and students had not adopted caring attitudes towards each other and their work ethics. When selecting biographies, students gravitated towards colorful contemporary individuals who had attained material wealth in a relatively easy manner. Sport figures, rock stars, movie stars, and media celebrities were admired for their audaciousness and ability to command huge salaries. Career choices were based on the ability to "make lots of money." For example, those students who expressed an interest in pursuing a career in the medical profession chose this field in order to become "rich." Altruism and a genuine desire to help others were not usually the reasons proffered for career choices.

Today's society had spawned individuals who put themselves first and had little regard for involving themselves in projects that promoted community and the greater good. Cooperative learning was difficult to accomplish. An emphasis was placed on competition rather than cooperation in sports, games, and contests. Winning was the goal. Children had learned how to manipulate and exploit. In group projects they shirked responsibility and looked towards others to do their work. Excuses for unfinished work were numerous and, in their mind, nearly always caused by outside influences. Then, too, teachers misapplied cooperative learning techniques and did not establish the groundwork necessary for successful application.

In order to become more responsible, children must be exposed to situations that promote it. However, many schools are located in disordered communities limiting opportunities for prosocial activities.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature reveals a growing concern about the low level of responsibility generally displayed by today's students. The subject of nurturing and cultivating this positive character trait among youngsters has been the focus of a number of recent books and journal articles. A general awareness that something must be done is coming to the forefront. Responsibility is a necessary core value and must be addressed (Vincent, 1995). Respect and responsibility are character traits that require a caring attitude. If students are not taught to care, today's problems will remain unsolved. People who care know how to act towards others, know how to treat someone with respect, and know how to behave responsibly.

Educators have been reluctant to shape the character of students. They voice concerns about becoming embroiled in controversial issues. Schools have become overcrowded and the sheer number of students appear to have reduced their importance. The absence of a strong sense of community has resulted in negative attitudes towards school and learning (Peterson, 1992). Schools are a mirror of today's society and teaching students to be responsible has been neglected (Vincent, 1995). Many of our problems today can be attributed to a lack of good character. In recent years, students have not been taught to care about the values of respect and responsibility, both critically important in the development of good character. When students care about themselves and others, they will act with respect and they will behave responsibly. In the past, religious traditions and beliefs have helped individuals become better persons. The teachings of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism all include

guidelines for respectful and responsible behavior, but over the years their stronghold over the general populace has lessened.

Lickona (1992) believes that our society is in the midst of a moral crisis. Troubling youth trends present a dark picture. Violence and vandalism are seven times greater in the United States than in Canada and 40 times higher than in Japan. The murder rate for American youths doubled from 1965 to 1975. Other concerns are stealing, cheating, disrespect for authority, peer cruelty, bigotry, bad language, sexual precocity and abuse, increasing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility, and self-destructive behavior. The time to take on the challenge of character development is now.

Low levels of responsibility have contributed towards a contumacious society (Kilpatrick, 1992). The United States has the highest murder rate for 15- to 24- year olds among the industrialized nations (National Center for Health Statistics, 1987). It is also the most violent (National Research Council, 1992). The biggest concerns facing teachers today are: (1) drug abuse; (2) alcohol abuse; (3) teen-age pregnancy; (4) suicide; (5) rape, robbery, and assault. With these major issues, low responsibility levels in young people requires investigation.

Brooks & Kann (1992) believe that children are not born with the ability to make ethical decisions. During the 1960's and 1970's, a person's individuality and rights were considered paramount. This era of "personalism" has contributed towards selfishness (Lickona, 1993). Parents' concern was with themselves, rather than with responsibilities involving their children. While most people become parents one day, many are not very good at it (Noddings, 1995). The role of the family is crucial in learning to care and nurture (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995). Social fragmentation results when effective moral

communities are not established.

Today's students have no heroes. Positive role models have largely been absent from students' lives (Kilpatrick, 1992; Wynne & Ryan, 1993). Actors, media celebrities, rock stars, and sports figures earn admiration for their ability to command high salaries and "success," but do not inspire students to become better persons. When two teams or two individuals are engaged in sporting contests, the outcome becomes terribly important as if something crucial were at stake (Kilpatrick, 1992). The entertainment industry has taken control and become a powerful influence on the young. When immorality or irresponsible behavior of celebrities is exposed, it does no harm to their standing. It may, in fact, boost their ratings and the public's interest in them. The use of literature to teach important lessons on responsibility and other virtues has been neglected (Bennett, 1993). Examples of true heroism provide fertile ground for learning that struggles are unavoidable and that contributions to life must be made.

The failure to teach responsible behavior may be far more serious than declining Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) scores (Kilpatrick, 1992). Decision-making models of instruction have not had the result hoped for in having students clarify values and become independent thinkers. Open-ended discussions on ethical and moral dilemmas make for lively classroom discussions, but do not translate into matters of everyday conduct. Teachers who preface each discussion by saying that there are no right or wrong answers cannot expect students to come away with any distinct learning. Of further concern is the fact that many teachers have not received the necessary training in values education (Brooks & Kann, 1992). Traditional cultures used epics, songs, paintings, sculptures and

stories to educate and socialize their youth. These have been rejected for a talk-show format of learning.

Appropriate friendships are very important in the lives of young people (Noddings, 1995). From them, students learn to accept responsibility for the moral growth of others as well as themselves. Making wise choices regarding friends is vitally important (Bennett, 1993). True friendships take time and effort. Admiration and praise are one dimension of friendship, but so are frankness and criticism. Children have not been taught to recognize counterfeit relationships. Poorly defined relationships and negative peer pressure have dissuaded students from becoming responsible individuals. Peer cruelty in schools includes insults, bullying, and physical violence (Lickona, 1992). Opportunities for social development and the building of positive relationships among children have not been sufficiently stressed. Kagan (1992) states that the absence of cooperative classroom structures where students learn to help, share, and care has given rise to selfism. Students have not developed true relationships and, as a result, have not learned to value others (Lickona, 1992). An exaggerated emphasis on promoting individual student self-esteem at all cost has discouraged student diligence (Wynne & Ryan, 1993). Slavin (1990) postulates that the lack of cooperative learning opportunities has restricted the development of true self-esteem. Real self-esteem is earned, not given. Students have not learned to work in groups and are unable to assume individual or group responsibilities.

The development of a responsible demeanor and a good character has held importance throughout the ages. The great philosopher, Aristotle, believed that the development of a good character was a learned skill (Aristotle as cited in Vincent, 1995). Behavior, good and bad, is imitated. Plato advanced the notion that one could become a

better person by engaging in dialogue or discussion. One learns to be good by knowing and understanding what is good. Schools have abandoned their role in character building and learning to become "good" has largely been ignored (Vincent, 1995). Teaching children how to become good persons has been subsumed by the teaching of survival skills such as gun safety, AIDS awareness, and drug abuse.

A number of researchers have focused on caring. Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden (1995) believe that without caring, genuine education cannot occur. If youngsters are not given an opportunity to care for others, they will be unable to show increased responsibility levels and will be hindered from reaching a higher level of self-esteem. Without care, children lack the will and desire to do their best (Noddings, 1995). A school setting that does not engender caring behaviors cannot produce competent learners. Caring involves helping (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995). Schools have largely ignored the enormous social changes that have taken place over the years (Noddings, 1995). They have ill prepared students for the world of work, for parenting, and for civic responsibility. Caring implies the type of competence that requires responsible behaviors.

Teachers and students alike suffer from burnout (Kohn, 1993). There is no minimum age for burnout. Common symptoms displayed by students are disengagement and apathy. The cause of this malady may stem from a lack of control. Students have little say about what they wish to do. Too often their entire day is spent working on someone else's agenda. Teachers provide little opportunity for students to influence their own learning. Research shows that it is this powerlessness that results in lower scores and irresponsible behavior. Raising achievement scores has become more important than the

development of character. Daydreaming, failure to complete assignments, and student conflicts may be due to a teacher's unwillingness to relinquish power.

A review of the literature has confirmed that the lack of responsibility in students (as well as adults) has caused a plethora of problems. When children learn to assume responsibility and a caring attitude, many future problems may be averted. Problems involving drugs, teenage pregnancy, poor parenting skills, abuse, self-centeredness, poor workmanship, and the inability to maintain a steady job, can be attributed to irresponsible behavior patterns. Students who develop the ability to accept responsibility for themselves, their work, and others have an advantage over those who do not.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The gifted students in Grade 4 will demonstrate an increased responsibility level in completing assignments, maintaining home/school communications, participation in group work, and environmental care.

Expected Outcomes

The following general outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. Students will become more attentive to completing homework and classwork in a timely manner.
2. Students will maintain the necessary supplies for efficient classroom management.
3. Students will return parent/teacher communications in a timely manner.
4. Students will participate fully in cooperative learning situations.
5. Students will contribute towards maintaining a clean environment.

The following specific outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. A teacher checklist will indicate that given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior in completing homework and classwork on time, students will respond positively on 115 occasions.
2. A teacher checklist will indicate that given 128 opportunities for demonstrating

responsible behavior involving progress reports, parent/teacher communications, school supplies, and other necessary purchases, students will respond positively on 110 occasions.

3. Systematic teacher observations will indicate that given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior in cooperative learning and environmental behavior, students will respond positively on 115 occasions.

4. A student survey will indicate that 14 out of 16 students view themselves as responsible persons "most of the time."

Measurement of Outcomes

A written teacher checklist on student responsibility was used to measure outcomes 1 and 2. This particular instrument was selected to tally students' completion and response rates. This checklist was maintained over a 4-week period and provided information on students' completion rates of homework and classwork, as well as their response rate in returning progress reports with parent signature, general parent/teacher communications, availability of necessary school supplies, and necessary purchases. The checklist was also used as a basis of comparison with the checklist used to establish evidence for the existence of the problem.

A written observation record was maintained over a period of 4 weeks to document responsible cooperative behavior in terms of group work and environmental clean-up for outcome 3. This particular instrument was selected to record instances of cooperate student behavior and instances when students were mindful of their duties to clean up the classroom environment. It was also used as a basis of comparison

with the written observation record that was used to establish evidence regarding the existence of the problem.

A written student survey was conducted at the conclusion of the implementation process to determine if students viewed themselves as responsible in terms of classwork, homework, and in the area of parent/teacher communications for outcome 4. This particular instrument was selected for comparison with the survey conducted prior to implementation to document information regarding the existence of the problem.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of Problem

The problem that was to be solved in this practicum was that some of the gifted students in the Grade 4 gifted language arts classroom were demonstrating inconsistent and low levels of responsibility in completing homework and classwork assignments, working cooperatively, serving as a liaison between home and school, and in maintaining an orderly environment as indicated by teacher developed checklists, surveys, and observations. Homework and classwork were often unfinished or forgotten. Follow-up communications to and from parents were often overlooked or neglected. Group and environmental behaviors were often less than desirable.

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The literature identified many possible solutions to the problem of inconsistent and low responsibility levels. The development of a caring attitude and positive character traits were key components in attaining higher levels of responsibility. Suggested strategies for solving the identified problem in this practicum addressed the affective, environmental, social, and cognitive domains.

The oft-quoted slogan of "Reading, (W)riting, and (A)rithmetic "should include a fourth "R," namely, Responsibility (Lickona, 1992). Just as the core subjects are taught in school, so should responsibility, as a dimension of good character, be taught. In learning how to become responsible, students learn how to care. The instruction that students are to receive should be comprehensive in nature and call upon the teacher to:

1. Act as a role model, mentor, and caregiver.

2. Create a sense of community in the classroom where moral acts are recognized and valued.

3. Promote and practice moral discipline by setting and following rules that foster self-control.

4. Involve students in the decision-making process in order to create a democratic environment.

5. Use academic subjects as a springboard to teach important values.

6. Provide opportunities for students to work and learn in a cooperative manner.

7. Promote the development of a "conscience of craft" (p. 70) to develop students' academic responsibility so that they may experience a regard for the value of learning and for quality work.

8. Provide opportunities for moral reflection through reading, writing, debate, decision-making activities, and discussion.

9. Teach students how to resolve conflicts in a fair and non-violent manner.

Classroom strategies for caring beyond the classroom must be a key component of a comprehensive approach to teaching values and character education. By creating a positive and moral school climate, and by forming partnerships with parents and communities, the development of a character based on respect and responsibility will be possible. Schools must foster the formation of a good character and all other things will fall into place (Kilpatrick, 1992).

Character focuses on the development of traits that we want our children to learn (Wynne & Ryan, 1993). Chief among these traits is responsibility. Rules can be used to

teach values and students should participate in establishing them. Responsibility begins by setting rules (Lickona, 1992). Lemming (1993) postulates that rules for responsible behavior must be clearly stated and student ownership of the rules is necessary. This is particularly true in the cases of gifted students. They must be made to feel that what they are doing has relevance in the real world (Clark, 1988). Procedures and rules are an integral part of developing good practices and habits, and the development of good habits will lead to the development of moral character (Vincent, 1995).

The use of moral dilemma discussions can serve to advance a student's moral stage to a higher one (Kohlberg, 1981). Three things must be present in a classroom for moral stage progression: controversial dilemmas, differing moral development levels, and Socratic questioning techniques (Lickona, 1992).

A unit on heroes and heroism can also have positive results. By reading about heroic behavior, students' interests in developing similar characteristics will be heightened. Literature can provide examples of right and wrong, good and bad. Teachers can promote moral and ethical development by making thoughtful decisions on literary selections (Bennett, 1993). Children tend to fantasize about becoming like a hero in a book in the hopes that their lives may also be like a story (Kilpatrick, 1992). By introducing students to people (in literature) who have left their mark on society because of their exemplary behavior, they can transfer the behavior to their own lives (McAlpine, Weincek, Jeweler, & Weincek, 1994). This, in turn, will help them develop respect for others and acquire a social responsibility (Hill, 1994). Ryan (1993) suggests exposing children to stories about noble and responsible persons. His example of Louis Slotten, a physicist, who exposed himself to radioactive plutonium to save the lives of his coworkers, allows children to

learn about sacrifices and contributions made by others. Embarking on a unit featuring heroes and acts of heroism, students will begin to see how many good people there are and how happiness comes to those who help as well as to those who receive (Lickona, 1992).

Literature, in general, can be used to develop a good character (Kilpatrick, 1992). Myths, adventure stories, and novels can take on an inward journey where the question, "What personality dynamics explain my behavior?" can be asked (p. 192). Children's eyes are opened up by stories. They help them see that the way they act now will influence and affect their future (Cheney, 1991).

Kagan (1992) suggests that the use of cooperative grouping will increase individual responsibility. Cooperative classroom structures lead to cooperative students who learn how to help, share, and care. The "think, pair, share" buddy technique promotes positive interdependence, respect for others, and individual accountability. Schools must prepare students for the real world. Society and the workplace demand that people work together to solve problems, but each person must be given individual responsibilities (Slavin, 1990). In the case of gifted students, the cooperative learning activities must be structured in such a way that these students recognize that other members have talents and skills that can mean success for all (Clark, 1988). It is the job of the teacher to remind students that the character trait of responsibility should be part of cooperative learning both individually and as a group (Vincent, 1995). Cooperative learning creates powerful bonds and predisposes students to care about one another (Kohn, 1991).

Responsibility can be engendered by participation in community service projects. Young people will acquire a sense of responsibility when they become involved with others (Vincent, 1995). Peer tutoring is another avenue for involvement with someone in or out of school who may need assistance (Lickona, 1992). Consequently, students will become moral and more responsible. One proposal entitled the "Giraffe Project" encourages kids to "stick their neck out" by helping others (pp. 309-312). Membership in this enterprise entitles the person to a variety of educational materials including a teacher's kit and classroom activities. A half-hour video features eight people who have received Giraffe Project commendations. With a membership fee of $25.00, a subscription to Giraffe Gazette is sent out quarterly. This publication provides sources on role models.

Lickona (1992) proposes teaching students to acquire the "conscience of craft" by requiring students to do quality work in school and at home. Suggestions for furthering the development of this mindset include:

1. Start a homework assignment in class with students.
2. Follow up homework assignments with quizzes.
3. Allow students to plot their own grades.
4. Teach students how to employ a certain system.
5. Allow gifted students to explore a subject in depth and one that appeals to their area of interest.

The quality of a student's work will improve if a quality rubric is established (Vincent, 1995). Prior to handing in an assignment, students complete a rubric allowing for self-evaluation and reflection. Students may assist in developing such a rubric, and it

could be in the form of a checklist. Questions regarding neatness, grammar, detail, originality, and creativity could be asked and answered by the students themselves.

One of the most important things a teacher can do to maximize a student's potential is to create a sense of community in the classroom (Peterson, 1992). This can be done by using ceremonies, celebrations, rituals, rites, routines, and jobs to good advantage. An example of such a happening is the use of a competency rite. It is a type of passage rite and allows for a significant event to be celebrated. It ensures that attention is being paid to the event and gives special recognition to something that has been accomplished. By establishing a sense of community in the classroom, students will simultaneously experience a sense of trust. An open, honest, and encouraging community will guide and direct students on the pathway of success and nurture their talents into full bloom.

Boyer (1995), envisions a school that provides an overarching framework to educate the whole child. It should provide a sense of community with an atmosphere of purpose that promotes communication, discipline, care, and fairness. It celebrates the special accomplishments and significant occasions in a student's life. An essential dimension of education should be the development of character with an emphasis on responsibility and respect. Called "The Basic School," it takes the push for school renewal back to the beginning. Starting in elementary school, proven components of an effective education are brought together to teach the "whole child."

Description of Selected Solutions

In order to increase the responsibility levels of the gifted language arts students in Grade 4, this writer focused upon educating for character using specific strategies

suggested by Lickona (1992). The operative core value of responsibility (group and individual) was taught and practiced on a daily basis.

First and foremost, this writer strove to model an authentic caring attitude and to establish a sense of community within the classroom. This was accomplished by using strategies presented by Peterson (1992). They included making use of ceremonies, rituals, and rites to create a place where students experienced a sense of security and belonging. The goal was to liberate students so that they could take charge of themselves and their own education.

A community cannot function optimally without rules. Student input was sought and encouraged in establishing general and specific rules, guidelines, and procedures aimed at increasing student responsibility levels. Their personal involvement in this process made them stakeholders and provided them with a sense of ownership.

Moral dilemmas were presented and analyzed by students in order to improve their moral reasoning so that they felt better equipped to make personal choices with regard to issues involving responsibility. By using literature, current events, and specific happenings within the school, students were asked to participate in solving ethical dilemmas. Students were encouraged to respond thoughtfully and dubious moral principles were challenged.

Because Grade 4 gifted education was delivered by using a language arts approach, a unit on heroes and heroism was presented. Good habits of behavior were taught by having students identify with a person who practiced responsible behavior. Children look to imitate and opportunities for the development of positive character traits

were derived from this source. Literature emphasizing themes of care and responsibility was expected to affect students in a positive way.

The language arts component within the Grade 4 gifted class also presented an opportunity for students to create an anthology emphasizing the virtues of care, quality, and responsibility. As they researched and planned their writing, students became more fixed and focused on the development of good character traits. This involvement also aided them in increasing their leadership potential as it related to responsibility.

Cooperative learning was a major emphasis. The research indicated that it had many benefits (Lickona, 1992). Values and academics were taught simultaneously. The specific strategy employed for the purposes of this practicum was the learning partner strategy. Using "think, pair, share" techniques, students shared responsibility for classroom and homework assignments. They entered into contracts with a partner and the conditions and expectations of the partnership were clearly delineated. They also completed quality rubrics prior to handing in assignments using self-selected and teacher criteria. Students learned to self-evaluate and peer evaluate in order to improve the quality of their work.

Community involvement engendered a caring attitude. With this writer's guidance, students selected a worthwhile project and worked towards heightening awareness of animal needs and rights. Consequently, students were enriched and experienced a true self-regard. Students systematically maintained a journal documenting their involvement in their care-related activities. Responsible behavior was the focus of their writing.

The strategies addressed the goal of raising student responsibility in a holistic manner. Responsibility is a trait that has the potential to improve and positively impact the "whole" person. By promoting positive character traits, analyzing moral dilemmas, and participating in a worthwhile community service project, students acquired more caring attitudes. The use of literature, the study of heroes and heroines, the maintenance of a journal, and the creation of a class anthology emphasizing the virtues of care, quality, and responsibility reinforced the desired behaviors. The establishment of a classroom community with its set of rules, guidelines, and procedures promoted a sense of belonging and imbued students with a desire to do what is right and good. Finally, cooperative learning allowed students to assume responsibility not only for themselves, but for others as well. By acting as a partner or buddy to someone else, students learned from each other and built upon individual strengths.

Report of Action Taken

This practicum was implemented by this writer for a period of 12 weeks. The entire two hours of the language arts gifted class were designated to improve student responsibility levels either directly or indirectly. Language arts competencies and objectives, as well as gifted goals and objectives, were integrated into the program. The practicum project commenced on March 4, 1996, and it concluded on May 24, 1996. Because three Grade 4 gifted language arts students transferred to out-of-town locations during the implementation phase, only 13 of the 16 students completed the entire 12-week practicum program. This writer's role was to encourage, model, guide, direct, facilitate, and promote student progress in attaining the desired level of responsibility. Throughout the implementation process, student input was actively encouraged. Discussions on

progress, rites of passage, rituals, rules, and celebrations of achievement took place when appropriate. Students were asked to become stakeholders in their learning and every effort was made to establish connections and relevancy to real life.

The project began with an introduction of a unit on responsibility. A treat was placed in front of each student and students were asked to think of how responsible behavior should be "treated." They offered generic suggestions. A discussion ensued with students sharing ideas on what constitutes responsible behavior. Each of them was asked if he or she would like to make a personal commitment to raise their responsibility level. During the course of the week, students created a character "web" with mutually agreed-upon desirable traits. The "thread" that was to hold them all together was called "responsibility." Engaging everyone and encouraging participation was made easier with the "treat." The idea of "treating others as you would like to be treated" was mentioned by one of the students. A discussion on the use of ceremonies, rituals, and rites of passage was discussed and a sense of community was established. Students decided that a "study buddy" would help them become more responsible and they entered into contracts with another person. Duties included calling each other on the phone to determine that homework was completed by the due date. The students cooperatively established class rules, procedures, and guidelines for responsible behavior. It was decided that a large chart would aid them in "staying on top of things."

The following week, students began a mini-unit on heroes and heroines. They were able to choose a specific person and investigate what qualities caused that person to be labeled a hero or heroine." A distinction was made between what constituted heroism and what caused a person to become a "star." It was decided that heroes do things for

others, while stars do things for themselves. During this second week of implementation, students also began their responsibility journal. The goal was to document specific incidences of observable responsible behavior. Students' awareness of good deeds was heightened. Cooperative learning, critical thinking, introspection, and insightful thinking were praised and acknowledged.

The students continued their mini-unit on heroes and heroism during the third week, but also listened to an audio-tape of a book entitled Wagon Wheels (Brenner, 1993). While the initial plan had been to read Wagon Wheels with their study buddies, it was decided to build student listening skills through active listening. Using Journeys (Hill, 1994), a study guide, multi-cultural interdisciplinary lessons and activities followed. Students role-played situations involving responsible and irresponsible behavior with regard to the novel. They engaged in "What if..." discussions that focused on what would have happened to the protagonists in Wagon Wheels had they acted irresponsibly.

At the conclusion of the first month, students had researched specific heroes or heroines and critically assessed what responsible behaviors were necessary to persevere and survive. They had maintained their responsibility journals by documenting observable responsible behavior. In their journal, they had also listed ways to show responsibility at home and at school. It was decided to cooperatively develop a quality rubric. The rubric was intended to assess the quality of their own work as well as the quality of their buddy's work.

During the first week of the second month, the class decided to become involved in a community project. Several of the students put forth the idea of calling the Humane Society. One student made the contact with a representative from the organization and

arrangements were made for a class visit. Students were enthusiastic because the idea of supporting the Humane Society had been theirs. They made posters and advertised their intent to solicit donations school-wide. Towels, blankets, dog food, cat food, soap, and animal toys were collected and presented to the Humane Society over the course of one month. Students also continued their journal writing and study guide activities. They began preparations for a hero/heroine symposium. The study buddy system prospered as homework and classwork yielded satisfying results.

During the second month, students continued with their journal writing, and began a new novel entitled The Sign of the Beaver (Speare, 1983). This book was added to the initial plan because the novel Wagon Wheels had been rather simplistic and had not challenged them sufficiently. The new book, The Sign of the Beaver, was read avidly and its lessons on responsibility were eagerly discussed. A symposium relative to their unit on heroes/heroines was held at the conclusion of the second month with students orally presenting information while dressed up as their favorite character. The chart recording progress was filled with stars and students were proud of their accomplishments. They had further refined the habit of calling their buddies to remind them of homework obligations. If a student forgot to do his or her work, they were not reproached. Rather, a resolve was made by his or her buddy to be more avid and vigilant in supporting the student.

The focus of the third month was the compilation of a student anthology. Each week for four weeks, students wrote on the topic of responsibility. Definition poetry, fables, diamantes, biographical writing, and expository and narrative writing was assigned and completed. Their published copies were placed in a notebook and prominently

displayed. The stages of writing were observed and their final copy was produced on computers for uniformity. Several of the students added artwork for interest. While they had intended to sell their anthologies and donate the proceeds to the Humane Society, this goal could not be accomplished. The end of the school year was too near and there were too many complicating factors, such as field trips, field day, and other special performances. However, a reception for the "unveiling" of the anthology was given and snacks and refreshments were served. Throughout the month, the children continued to read to each other from The Sign of the Beaver (Speare, 1983) and this writer shared pertinent selections from The Book of Virtues (Bennett, 1993). These literary selections provided numerous opportunities for discussion and reflection. They also provided timely opportunities for exploring moral and ethical questions. Of particular interest was the question regarding the trapping of animals. In the book The Sign of the Beaver (Speare, 1983), an Indian boy begrudgingly befriends the protagonist who is subsisting on a meager diet of fish, corn, nuts, and berries. He teaches him how to trap animals for food. The students' recently acquired interest in animal rights made for a lively discussion. They showed a keen understanding of killing animals for purposes of sustenance and survival as opposed to hunting animals for pleasure.

Chapter V: Results

Results

This practicum was conducted in order to improve fourth grade gifted students' responsibility levels in the areas of completing work, communicating information to parents, and maintaining a clean and orderly environment. Strategies used to attain this goal were social, cognitive, affective, and environmental in nature. Using an interdisciplinary and thematic approach, students researched heroes and heroines who exemplified responsible behavior. They also read novels that promoted prosocial and cooperative behavior. Awareness was increased by various writing activities. The selection of and involvement in a community project authenticated their learning.

The specific outcomes for this practicum were:

1. A teacher checklist will indicate that given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior in completing homework and classwork on time, students will respond positively on 115 occasions.

This outcome was met.

The checklist indicated that students were given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior in completing homework and classwork on time and that students responded positively on 119 occasions. The results indicated that the projected response rate of 115 was exceeded by 4.

2. A teacher checklist will indicate that given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior involving progress reports, parent/teacher communications,

school supplies, and other necessary purchases, students will respond positively on 115 occasions.

This outcome was met.

The checklist indicated that students had been given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior involving home/school communication. The results indicated that students had responded favorably on 115 occasions. The projected outcome of 110 was exceeded by 5.

3. Systematic teacher observations will indicate that given 128 opportunities for demonstrating responsible behavior in cooperative learning and environmental behavior, students will respond positively on 122 occasions.

This outcome was met.

The observation instrument indicated that students were given 128 opportunities to demonstrate responsible behavior in cooperative learning and environmental behavior. The results indicated that students responded positively on 122 occasions. The projected response rate of 115 was exceeded by 7.

4. A student survey will indicate that 14 of 16 students will view themselves as responsible persons "most of the time."

This outcome was met.

The student survey was given to 13 students because 3 of 16 students had relocated to other schools within the 12-week implementation period. All 13 of the students indicated that they viewed themselves as responsible persons "most of the time." This exceeded the projected rate of 14 of 16 students as 13 of 13 student responses had been positive for a 100% success rate.

Discussion

The results of this practicum project were gratifying. The entire process proved to be a very positive experience for this writer and all of the students who participated. For this writer, the operative word throughout the duration of this practicum was "consistency." It was the glue that held the project together. Once the students realized that there would be consistent monitoring, that every omission would be tallied, that no one would be dismissed from class without cleaning up the environment, and that cooperating with fellow students would improve their success rate, a gradual change became evident. By the conclusion of the practicum project, this writer observed a genuine fellowship, camaraderie, and spirit that had previously been absent from the classroom.

One particular event that demonstrated this spirit in the classroom involved two children who had been diagnosed with attention-deficit disorders while still in kindergarten. Both had very low success rates when it came to handing in assignments on time, maintaining home/school communication, and participating in environmental clean-up. When they chose each other as study buddies, this writer had some concerns. For the first several weeks of the project, homework was handed in sporadically. Although there was a degree of improvement at the start, there were occasions of "recidivism." Then, one of the two students, began to show some true consistency. The other student remained inconsistent. The day came when each and every student, including the "inconsistent one," completed their week's homework on schedule. There was joy and jubilation among the students. The students spontaneously cheered the child who had

been slow to respond, and some students left their seats to shake his hand. From that day forward, all of this student's homework was handed in, not only on time, but ahead of time. (All homework was assigned on Monday and due on Friday.) As a result, he became the greatest champion of the quest towards more responsible behavior.

It is believed that the variety of activities contributed to the success of the project. The book, The Sign of the Beaver (Speare, 1983), was extremely useful in setting the tone. It served as the overarching literary framework. In this book, it was essential for the protagonist to be resourceful and responsible; his very life depended on it. The sense of drama and adventure coupled with an unusual friendship maintained student interest. Bennett (1993) indicates that thoughtful literary selections can increase student interest in developing positive characteristics. One particular reading selection provided detailed descriptive passages that explained how to make a bow and arrow. It provided the impetus for the cooperative activity of making a bow and arrow of their own. (Kagan, 1995) states that cooperative activities help increase individual responsibility.

The book also provided several opportunities for tackling moral and ethical issues. The use of moral dilemma discussions can lead to an advancement in moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981). Through reading, role-playing and creative problem-solving activities ensued naturally. When contact was established with the local Humane Society, the unit on responsibility became more authentic for them. All of the students were seen crowding around the telephone as their chosen representative placed that first call. Children acquire a sense of responsibility when they become involved in helping others (Vincent, 1995).

At the onset of the project, the record-keeping and charting of student successes was maintained by this writer. After several weeks, two students, quite naturally, took

control of the charting by physically checking to see if the environment passed inspection and if all assigned work had been completed. Only then, did these students dismiss the others. Prior to this experience, these two organizers had not shown much leadership, and they came to prize the confidence that was placed in them.

The study buddy system was a successful component of the project. After the unit was introduced, the students were consulted as to whether or not they would enjoy trying this method. Upon agreement, contracts were drawn up. These contracts had specific clauses outlining the terms and conditions. The classroom solemnly observed the "signing ceremony." The signing of the contract was duly "witnessed" by this writer and another teacher who had been drafted for the occasion. The buddies took down phone numbers and reminded each other of due dates. On several occasions, a student would testify how his or her buddy had saved him or her from near "disaster" by providing assistance telephonically. Kohn (1991) states that cooperative learning establishes powerful bonds that predispose students to care for each other. These buddies did not limit their assistance to the specific language arts gifted class, but extended it to other classrooms and other situations.

Peterson (1992) posited that ceremonies, rites, and rituals enhance motivation and create a positive classroom environment. Without a certain amount of spirit, the success of this practicum project may not have been ensured. Just as the "contract signing ceremony" brought a certain dignity and formality to the occasion, other important events were also given their due. The symposium that was held to showcase their hero or heroine investigations was attended by another class. Invitations were sent out. Cookies and refreshments were served during an "intermission." The anthology unveiling was

another significant event. This occasion was set apart by formal student readings. Parents were invited to attend and "wine" (white grape juice) and cheese were offered. Recognition of individual student milestones were also observed. A student was seated in a "compliment chair" and everyone offered positive comments regarding the specific achievement or accomplishment.

There were occasions when students would "cover" for each other. This was not done covertly, but openly. It may be that a student left a dictionary or folder on a table. Technically, this would have been a mark against his or her record on the environmental clean-up chart. However, a child spotting the item would address the errant student and casually comment, "You left your book over here, I'll put it away for you." This type of infraction was allowable because it promoted the greater good -- that of cooperating with each other, and getting the job done. It, quite possibly, was the only exception to this writer's self-imposed rule of consistency.

The quality rubric was another element that contributed towards the positive outcomes. It constantly reinforced the need to do one's best. The self-evaluation process provided a time for analysis and reflection. Vincent (1995) indicates that the quality of work improves through the use of rubrics.

The combination of strategies proved effective in changing certain behavioral patterns. Because responsibility levels increased, students experienced a sense of true self-esteem and positive self-regard. The result was a joyful, productive classroom environment. Cooperation and the celebration of certain rites and rituals proved to be incentives towards achieving set goals. By self-selecting a community project and certain aspects of their learning, students became interested stakeholders. Their interest is reading

was heightened as a result of the link to responsibility, friendship, and their community project. The interdisciplinary nature of the unit was appreciated by students whose gifts and talents did not necessarily lie in the language arts domain.

Recommendations

This approach to increasing responsibility levels is recommended for regular classroom teachers as well as certain types of special education classes. Regular classroom teachers and special education teachers have indicated to this writer that a need exists for students to become more responsible. Because this writer's experience is limited to the elementary level, and because most of the research focused on the elementary school years, it would appear that the strategies utilized in this project are most effective in the elementary school grades. While the theme of responsibility would lend itself to any number of study units, it was especially effective when accompanied with daily reading. The novels chosen focused on responsible behavior and tended to systematically reinforce the theme.

It is further recommended that a unit promoting responsibility take place at the beginning of a school year when habits are not so firmly entrenched. Consistency is a key element and this consistency would have to be maintained for the duration of the full school year. By involving certain dependable types of students, much of the record-keeping and charting could be delegated, however.

This writer firmly believes that the creation of a positive classroom climate is essential. The observing of ceremonies, rites, and rituals were most effective in creating spirit and adventure. If modifications to this practicum are made by others, it is suggested

that this aspect of the practicum be kept in place. It was integral to the success of the project.

A final recommendation involves the selection of study buddies. In this case, students were given the choice of self-selection or teacher-selection. Those who elected to self-select met with this writer privately in order to ascertain that motives were healthy and would produce the desired result. Those who elected for teacher intervention were carefully paired according to perceived strengths and weaknesses. By giving everyone a choice, no one harbored any resentment and the process proceeded smoothly from the beginning.

Dissemination

The results of this practicum will be shared with interested individuals at the school site. The methods and strategies employed will be made available to the administrative and teaching staff. The School Improvement Committee has indicated that it will be adding the character trait of responsibility to their plans for school improvement for the upcoming school year and has asked for this writer's input and cooperation.

Additionally, the contents of this practicum will be shared with the school district's gifted education department. This writer expects to present pertinent information at an upcoming conference on gifted eduction. Strategies for improving responsibility levels in gifted students will be featured.

An in-service presentation will also be made to doctoral students this summer and the strategies, techniques, and results will be made available to them. Networking may also present other opportunities for dissemination.

An abstract of the practicum will be sent to editors of Gifted Child Today. If an interest in the material is expressed, the writer will readily agree to submit a suitable article for its publication.

Finally, an abstract will be sent to the school district that employs this writer. If the district's department of curriculum development indicates an interest in promoting the techniques and methods used to solve the problem of student disengagement, this writer will cooperate in any way possible.

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